(c) the steps taken/proposed to be taken to ensure that full strength of the real workforce in the Army is achieved?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A. K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) The sanctioned strength of Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) including sepoys in the Army and those actually m place (as on 30th September, 2007) is 11,01,090 and 11,20,077 respectively. There is, therefore, no shortage of PBORs in the Army.

However, there is a shortage of 11,371 officers in the Army which is mainly in the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and below. Serveral measures have been taken by Government to enhance recruitment in the Army. All Officers including those in short Service Commission (SSC) have been made eligible to hold substantive rank of Captain, Major and Lieutenant Colonel and equivalents after 2, 6 and 13 years of reckonable service respectively. The term of SSC Officers has been extended to 14 years. This has made the Army an attractive career option. Besides Army has undertaken sustained image projection publicity campaign to create awareness among the youth. Awareness campaigns, participation in career fairs and exhibitions, advertisements in print and electronic media are also some of the other measures in this direction.

Modernisation of Infantry Battalions

1662. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that plan to modernize the infantry battalions and equip them which light-weight combat weapons night vision device, light weight combat kit etc. will take at least 10-12 years *Le.* if adequate funds can be provided to them;

(b) whether the sluggish pace of modernization will result in technological obsolescence by the time army is equipped with these systems and the cutting edge of infantry battalions will be lost; and

(c) if so, what action Government propose to take to modernize the infantry battalions without losing much time to maintain the cutting edge?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A. K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) Modernization of Infantry Battalions is an on-going process and is underway. While a number of modern weapons and equipment have already been procured, the plan envisages to induct substantial new technology and better weapon systems during the 11th Plan period. The requirement of hi-tech weapons and equipment is constantly reviewed to ensure replacement of existing technology by higher version as warranted by the operational necessity and funds provided accordingly.

Cartelisation of suppliers to ordnance factories

1663. SHRI MOHAMMED AMIN:
SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

whether audit has observed that there was formation of cartel amongst suppliers who quoted identical rates in 117 cases at 11 Ordnance Factories;

whether Rs. 500 crore worth order were placed during 2001 -2006 to such cartel without ensuring reasonableness of rates quoted; and

if so, the steps taken to break the cartel and ensure best economic offer?

THE MINISTEROF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI RAO INDERJEIT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. *Vide* C&AG's Report No. 19 of 2007 (Defence Services), which has been laid on the Table of the House on 24th August, 2007.

The value mentioned in C&AG's Report is Rs. 472.60 crore. Before completion of the procurement contracts, the reasonableness of the price is assessed co-relating with the input materia! prices prevailing in the market, wholesale price index, last paid rate etc.

Measures to break cartel formation are reviewed and fine-tuned on regular basis. The existing written guidelines to eliminate cartel formation were formulated by a committee in consultation with CVC in July 2007. The tender conditions as per the guidelines were modified by incorporating appropriate clauses.

Seizure of ammunition by coast guard

1664. SHRIMATI SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

whether it is a fact that during February, 2007 a boat carrying suicide jackets, plastic explosives, AK rifles and live ammunition was intercepted off the coast of Tamil Nadu, as also a boat carrying 100 kg. explosive, possibly for laying land and sea mines was seized off Rameshwaram coast;

if so, whether only our Coast Guard force is guarding the coastline or active assistance of Navy is also taken; and

whether the soft-targets like Andaman and Nicobar islands are adequately protected, as gun running and drug trafficking from Myanmar/Bangladesh cannot be completely ruled out?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A. K.ANTONY): (a) to(c) The Coast Guard apprehended a fishing boat 'Sri Ramajayan' ofFTamil Nadu coast carrying o 1AK-56 rifle, 124 founds of ammunition, 03 hand grenades, 01 explosive laden suicide jacket alongwith some other items concealed on the both side of the boat on 13th February, 2007. Indian navy provides active assistance to Coast Guard in their surveillance/patrolling along the coast.

The security and surveillance arrangements in India's territorial waters and exclusive